

Soldier Integration in OIF: How to Keep Who You Get

By Major Richard A. McConnell and
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However much we may honor the “Unknown Soldier” as the symbol of sacrifice in war, let us not mistake the fact that it is the “Known Soldier” who wins battles.

Men Against Fire by SLA Marshall

The level to which a Soldier is “known” by his unit affects his success and survival in combat. Conversely, the level at which the Soldier knows his unit is also vitally important.

The Army long has emphasized the importance of sponsorship programs of various types to facilitate the integration of newly assigned Soldiers into units. This process spans everything from familiarization with a new area of assignment to licensing on vehicles and equipment and weapons/crew certification.

If this process is less than effective in garrison, the consequences are bad enough. In combat, an improperly integrated Soldier easily can become a casualty in his first few days in theater.

To “keep the Soldiers we got” during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) I, the 1st Battalion, 12th Field Artillery (1-12 FA), Raiders, 17th Field Artillery Brigade out of Fort Sill, Oklahoma, designed and implemented a Soldier Certification/Integration Program for all newly assigned Soldiers. Its purpose was to ensure they received training that was relevant to the emerging situation and incorporated essential tasks. Proficiency in these tasks was vital to the Soldiers’ success in the Sunni Triangle, the battalion’s area of operations.

So how did we develop this program and what did it consist of? After occupying Logistical Supply Area Anaconda near Balad, Iraq (about 50 miles north of Baghdad), for about five months, we received our first replacements and established the program outlined in Figure 1 on Page 18.

This certification program was very successful in preparing new Soldiers for the many challenges of service in Iraq. It

helped “level the playing field” for all Soldiers arriving in our battalion, ensuring they had a certain knowledge base before they went out on their first combat mission.

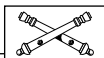
Because our first replacements happened to be officers, the one-day Soldiers Integration Program in Figure 1 actually evolved from a more extensive three-day program designed for officers that culminated with a right-seat-ride. Based on input from these first officers trained, the battalion improved the program and modified it for use for all Soldiers. See the Officer Integration Program outlined in Figure 2 on Page 18.

Although the number of tasks and the level of detail required to be accomplished at battalion level changed when applied to the enlisted ranks, the intent remained the same. It was vital to swiftly integrate new Soldiers into the battalion, teach them the basics of survival in their new situation and verify they had

these skills before they were exposed to combat missions.

This process produced “known Soldiers” out of new Soldiers, thereby enabling the battalion to receive 51 new Soldiers in seven months of combat and keep every one fully mission capable.

Soldier integration is as important today as it was 60 years ago. To keep new Soldiers alive, units must claim them, train them and certify them.



Major Richard A. McConnell recently returned from 12 months in Iraq as the S3 and the Executive Officer of 1st Battalion, 12th Field Artillery (1-12 FA), 17th Field Artillery Brigade, III Corps Artillery, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Previously, he was the Operations Officer for the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Deputy Chief of Staff for Training (DCST)-West at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He commanded Headquarters and Headquarters Battery (HHB), 41st Field Artillery Brigade, V Corps Artillery in Germany. He was a battery fire direction officer in 1-320 FA, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), in the Gulf during Operation Desert Storm.

Sergeant Major Leo Adams, Jr., recently returned from 12 months in Iraq, serving as the Command Sergeant Major of 1-12 FA. Currently, he is a Small Group Instructor in the Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas. He also was a First Sergeant in three separate batteries: B/25 FA (Target Acquisition), A/33 FA (Multiple-Launch Rocket System) and HHB, all in the 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized) in Germany. As First Sergeant of B/25 FA, he deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1996 as part of the Implementation Force (IFOR).

1. Soldier Read-Ahead Packets. These consisted of tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs); weapons-clearing procedures; rules of engagement (ROE); and a journal of battalion key operations since arriving in country.

2. Battalion Commander's in briefing included—

- You are a Soldier first and artilleryman, signalman, cook, etc., second.
- Force protection starts in the motor pool when you ensure your vehicle will make the convoy. Do not put other Soldiers at risk because you failed to conduct preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS).
- Precombat checks (PCCs)/precombat inspections (PCIs) to standard are a *must*—your life as well as others' lives depend on it.
- The enemy owns the first couple of seconds after an ambush or improvised explosive device (IED) goes off. You and your unit's quick reaction will determine how you and your unit come out of that contact. Be prepared to take the fight to the enemy at all times.
- Never forget that you are getting combat pay for a *reason*.

3. Command Sergeant Major's (CSM's) in briefing included—

All Soldiers:

- I won't accept anything less than your best efforts and discipline. This is combat.
- Listen to your NCOs, and have a battle buddy.
- Learn from the good Soldiers around you, and trust your gut

feelings and common sense.

- Basic soldiering skills and standards are *key*: PMCS, PCCs/PCIs, ROE, weapons, first aid, nine-line call for medical evacuation (MEDEVAC), responsibilities of guard duty and steps in reaction drills. *Always* be prepared to fight at a moment's notice.

- Your individual replacement training (IRT)/replacement integration training (RIT) were important. Now apply this knowledge and build on it.

Additional Information for NCOs—

- PCCs, PCCs, PCCs and more PCCs.
- Use good time management to train and inspect your Soldiers, ensuring they are ready to go at a moment's notice.
- Your soldiers require your direct leadership involvement—you cannot inspect and check them too much.
- Maintain situational awareness at all times. You never know when a situation will arise where you will have to lead Soldiers on the battlefield—*be ready*.

4. Battalion Executive Officer (XO) Briefing. He briefed battalion actions to date, theater orientation and the battalion's mission.

5. S2 Briefing. This included the threat, enemy situation, map reconnaissance, enemy trends and lessons learned; he then issued maps.

6. S3 Briefing. He briefed missions, TTPs, search and seizure, immediate action drills (react to incoming fire and react to direct fire), reporting procedures and ROE.

Figure 1: Soldier Integration Training Program Steps. NCO and enlisted training started at the battalion level and was completed at the battery level, resulting in less time spent at battalion, usually less than one day. First Sergeants then reported to battalion when all new Soldiers were certified on clearing their weapons and the ROE. Briefings were conducted by the commander, CSM and primary staff officers whenever the battalion's operational tempo (OPTEMPO) allowed; otherwise, the NCOs-in-charge (NCOICs) of the staff sections briefed the information.

7. Platoon Sergeant Training. The officer met his platoon sergeant who was responsible for teaching him how to use the precision lightweight global positioning system (GPS) receiver (PLGR) navigation techniques, convoy briefing standing operating procedures (SOP) and radio loading procedures.

8. Battalion XO Counseling. A block of time was set aside for the new officers to read their packets and receive counseling from the XO on Leader Book development.

9. S1 Briefing. This included personnel accountability, reports and awards.

10. S4 Briefing. He briefed requisition procedures, supplies available and existing contracts being worked for the officers' Soldiers.

11. Weapons Clearing Class. Each officer had to demonstrate hands-on proficiency in clearing the M16, M249, M2, M9 and MK19.

12. Battalion Maintenance Tech Briefing. He briefed -10/20 standards and PCC/PCIs for convoys.

13. Right-Seat-Ride. An observer controlled by the XO took the officer out on an operation, requiring the officer to—

- Conduct PCCs/PCIs successfully.
- Load a radio.
- Deliver a convoy briefing.
- Demonstrate proficiency in land navigation using a map and PLGR.

Figure 2: Officer Integration Program. This three-day program included all the steps in Figure 1 and those in this figure. The officers remained at the battalion level for this training and certification as part of the XO's officer education/mentorship program.